

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 19, 2018

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

We write today to demand immediate action on unacceptable wait times at VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System facilities.

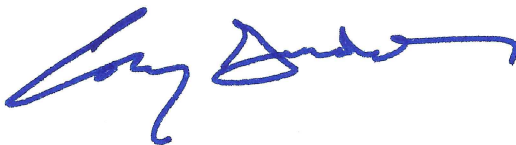
For the period ending on December 1, 2018, VA data show that 16.65 percent of medical appointments scheduled through the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (ECHCS) have a wait time of over 30 days. These wait times are the worst in the nation. This includes 7,374 belated appointments at the Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center, 1,201 at the PFC James Dunn Clinic in Pueblo, and 7,014 at the PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom Outpatient Clinic at Colorado Springs.

The latest numbers are even worse than the 13.5 percent of over 30-day appointments that the Denver Post cited in a July 2017 article on ECHCS wait times. Unacceptably high rates persist after years of congressional action, an alarming inspector general report, and a \$1.73 billion new facility designed to improve access to care across the Rocky Mountain region. The wait time issue is a disservice to Colorado veterans.

With the passage of the VA Maintaining Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act in June 2018, Congress acted, with our support, to enhance the health care experience for our nation's veterans. This bipartisan legislation provides new capabilities to the VA with the goal of improving the timeliness of veterans' access to health care.

The troubling November 2018 numbers demonstrate that the VA needs to prioritize solutions for Colorado veterans. As such, as MISSION is implemented, we request a report on how the VA intends to use existing authorities, as well as the new flexibility and tools provided in the MISSION Act, to expeditiously fix issues with wait times across ECHCS.

Sincerely,



Cory Gardner
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator